

The Character of Mathilde Loisel in Guy de Maupassant's The Necklace

Guy de Maupassant's character Mathilde Loisel, in "The Necklace", is above all a dreamer. Her dreams make her both weak and strong. Her weakness is that her dream is not to have high ideals, but rather to have a life of ease and wealth. Her strength is her willingness to work to keep her dreams of honor.

De Maupassant shows her qualities in the introduction, the coverup, and the poverty she endures. In the early part of the story Mathilde is a young housewife dreaming about wealth. She thinks money is everything and her highest aim is ease and luxury, which she thinks that she was somehow born to have.

Her husband, a lower-rank clerk, can afford only a small household. Mathilde gets angry at this gap between her dream and the reality of her life. The result is that she is not able to like anything that she has. She does not treat her husband with love and respect, but whines at him instead about their condition. Her borrowing of the necklace for the big party is, in a way, her attempt to escape her drab life and live out her dream, if only for a night.

The cover-up of the loss of the necklace brings out the worst in Mathilde. She believes more strongly in the real value of the jewels than in her friendship with Jeanne Forrestier. If she had told the truth to Jeanne, she would never have had the trouble she faced. But her character is too weak to permit her to endure the embarrassment that the truth would bring out. Thus, by covering up, she loses friendship, truth, and financial future all at the same time. But her life of poverty and sacrifice to pay back the moneylenders bring out her strengths. She pitches in to work. She gives up her servant, her good address, and everything else connected with her dreams of good living. Although her character is excellent in this respect, her hard work makes her loud and coarse, just the opposite of the wealthy, refined person she dreamed of becoming.

Thus Mathilde is a character whose dream life keeps her from seeing the truth until the truth hits her with a vengeance. It is this weakness, not her bad luck, that gives her all her pain. It is this same weakness that brings out her best quality of sharing the work to preserve her honor and good name. She may be dreamy, unlucky, and foolish, but she is not bad.

On balance, she comes out looking good, getting a life that is much worse than she deserves. Extracts taken from: Roberts, Edgar V., Writing Themes About Literature, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1983